



OVERVIEW

Leesburg is in the midst of a dynamic growth period. The town's population has nearly doubled every decade since 1950, and in 1984 the annexation of 3,900 acres of mostly vacant land more than tripled the town's physical size. This vacant land is subject to increasing development pressure as the metropolitan economy continues to expand westward. Development pressure also affects the land outside the town's corporate limits, particularly between Leesburg and the developing eastern portion of Loudoun County. The town has a significant interrelationship with and interest in these adjacent areas. Leesburg's challenge is not only to manage its own growth but also to influence growth of the surrounding area in ways that reinforce the town's historic identity as an urban center.

The comprehensive plan is the town's chief tool for dealing with growth. Leesburg adopted its first comprehensive plan in 1974. That plan, never revised, was rapidly overtaken by growth and annexation and was replaced by the 1986 Town Plan, which provided planning policy for the newly expanded town. The 1997 Town Plan is an update of the elements of the 1986 plan relative to statistical data, trend analyses, and projections. Where appropriate, policies have been revised to reflect current circumstances and economic and community needs. This update is intended to provide a framework for planning through the year 2015.

Planning is a process of formulating goals and objectives and the strategies necessary to achieve them. The Town Plan is a valuable tool to the town's government, to its citizens, and to the private sector. It is an official statement of the Town Council which describes a vision of Leesburg's future and allows the Council and Planning Commission to coordinate their policies and actions to guide town development. The major purposes of the plan are to:

- Provide a guide for the many public and private decisions that create the future town;
- Promote the interests of citizens at large;
- Enhance the town's physical environment;
- Develop a coordinated, well-planned system of public services and utilities; and
- Evaluate short-term actions against long-term goals.

The major issues facing Leesburg today are growth and economic stability, and the effects of these factors on the town's quality of life. This plan provides policy guidance for addressing future issues in a variety of contexts: the greater Leesburg area, the environment, housing, economic development, public services, land use, historic preservation and urban design, transportation, and parks and recreation.

VISION OF LEESBURG'S FUTURE

The Town Plan is guided by a vision of future Leesburg that includes:

- A separate and unique identity, including clearly defined urban boundaries;
- A quality of life which includes healthy residential neighborhoods, adequate open space and recreational facilities, quality schools, and an efficient transportation system;
- A wide variety of residential, educational, economic, cultural, commercial and recreational

opportunities that permit Leesburg to be a relatively self-contained community;

- An Old and Historic District which is protected from adverse changes, and new construction throughout the town that is sensitive to the town's historic character and that contributes to the aesthetic quality of the community;
- A thriving downtown area that serves as a focal point for community activities, as well as a regional attraction for specialized shopping, dining and entertainment; and
- Coordination and cooperation between the downtown and shopping facilities in areas outside the town center.

TOWN CONTEXT IN LOUDOUN COUNTY

The Town of Leesburg is the major economic, social, and governmental center of Loudoun County. The actions of the county significantly impact all facets of the town's present and future, especially with regard to planning and development. An area of particular interest to the town is the unincorporated area which shares the watersheds with the town. This region of significant interest is called the Greater Leesburg Area (GLA) as depicted on map 0.1. Watersheds provide two practical bases for defining the municipality's area of interest. First, upstream development can have significant impact on runoff, water flow, and stream pollution. Second, watersheds usually define the area that is serviceable by gravity sewer systems.

Therefore, Leesburg's primary "area of interest" encompasses the Limestone Branch, Big Spring, Cattail Branch, Tuscarora Creek, Sycolin Creek, Goose Creek, and Potomac River watersheds and their associated ridge lines.

For the most part, this area consists of the north side of the lower Goose Creek basin between two ridge roads--Route 659 (Belmont Ridge Road) on the east and Route 662 (Canby Road) on the west, following the ridge line of Catoctin Mountain. Its boundaries are anchored by important physical features that "announce" the approaches to Leesburg. One is Goose Creek itself, a state scenic river, which establishes the south and east boundaries. The southern perimeter is reinforced in the area east of Route 15 by a significant stretch of permanent open space that includes the historic Oatlands property, the Emmet estate and the Banshee Reeks estate. On the west, the boundary follows the Catoctin ridge northward across Clark's Gap to another permanent open space, the historic Morven Park estate. From Morven Park, the boundary flows east with Limestone Branch to the Potomac River, whose steep, wooded banks furnish a natural edge for both the town and the Greater Leesburg Area.

These boundaries are both well-defined and defensible. Consisting largely of major watercourses, slopes and permanent open space, they enjoy considerable protection from development and serve as a greenbelt encircling the area. The protected character of this natural, open perimeter promotes a proper direction for growth: outward from the area's existing urbanized core at Leesburg. It is in the best interests of both the town and the county to cooperate in strictly controlling the level and location of development in the Greater Leesburg Area so as to encourage that outward growth pattern. Maintaining the town and its immediate environs as the focus of growth serves to strengthen the identity of Leesburg both as an urban center and as the point of reference for the larger area.

LEGAL BASIS AND USE OF THE PLAN

Every local government in Virginia is required by state law to adopt a comprehensive plan. In addition, the plan must be reviewed at least every five years to determine whether or not the plan should be amended. The purpose of a comprehensive plan, according to the state code, is to guide and accomplish "a coordinated, adjusted and harmonious development . . . which will, in accordance with present and probable future needs and resources, best promote the health, safety, morals, order, convenience, prosperity and general welfare of the inhabitants." The legislative goal of Chapter 11 of the Code of Virginia, as amended, is to facilitate the creation of a convenient, attractive and harmonious community. The achievement of this goal has been found by the Virginia courts to be a permissible state objective.

The plan is not an implementing document, but rather a guide to the preparation or revision of implementing regulations such as the zoning and subdivision ordinances. The plan does not necessarily lead to rezonings initiated by the Council, but should be used by the Commission and Council as guidance in considering rezoning and development proposals, road and public facility locations, and capital improvement program and budget recommendations. The policy maps contained in the plan, particularly the Land Use Policy Map, may not reflect the intended land use category. The Council has ultimate authority to interpret the plan and should refer to the written policies when construing the policy maps. The policy maps are intended to provide general locations for land uses, public facilities and roads. Specific locational decisions should be made at the project level after consultation with appropriate review agencies.

The plan is flexible enough to allow response to changing conditions and unexpected events. A review process is included to ensure that the plan can be changed to reflect the most current thinking of the Town Council and remain a useful guide for day-to-day decision-making. The plan should not be revised arbitrarily, but rather should be changed only after complete evaluation of the adopted goals, objectives and policies. The review process should include the opportunity for at least a brief review of the goals, objectives and policies to ensure that they conform to the wishes of the Town Council.

While the plan should be flexible enough to accommodate the unforeseen, it must contain standards and policies which provide sufficient guidance to elected and administrative officials in making land development decisions. The comprehensive plan is becoming increasingly important as a basis for making land use decisions. A well developed plan, with specific standards and policies, encourages consistency in town land use decisions.

HISTORY

Leesburg has a long tradition of planning efforts. The town's first zoning ordinance was enacted in 1947, and the Planning Commission was created in 1948. The Town Council contracted with consultants in 1955 to prepare a new subdivision ordinance, off-street parking plat and major thoroughfare plan. A new zoning ordinance was adopted in 1959, and the town's first comprehensive plan was adopted in 1974. Comprehensive plan revisions were prepared in 1981 but were never formally adopted because the annexation intervened. The 1986 Town Plan, developed with the assistance of a special task force appointed by the Council in early 1983, was designed to encompass the expanded town and to implement the annexation agreement with Loudoun County. A selective update of that plan was adopted in 1988. In 1990 a new zoning ordinance extended town zoning to the annexed area. The 1994 update of the Town Plan responds to the five-year review requirement and the release of authoritative statistical data from the 1990 U.S. Census.

PLAN ORGANIZATION

The plan is organized into nine elements: Urban Growth Area; Environment; Population, Housing and Community Development; Economic Development; Public Services; Land Use; Historic Preservation and Urban Design; Transportation; and Parks and Recreation. The plan includes long-term, intermediate-term and short-term planning perspectives. Long-term or ultimate development recommendations are provided primarily in the Land Use, Public Services, Transportation, and Greater Leesburg Area elements to adequately plan for proper land use relationships and necessary public services, utilities and transportation improvements to serve ultimate development. Projections contained in the plan are most reliable for a shorter, intermediate term of perhaps 10 years; they are useful in evaluating the course of development between the adoption of the plan and full development. These projections can be monitored and adjusted in light of changing conditions. Revised projections can then be used to amend the long-term plan recommendations. Short-term actions, scheduled to be implemented during the next five years, are also included in the plan.

Each plan element is organized in a similar fashion to facilitate use of the plan. Sub-categories within the elements include:

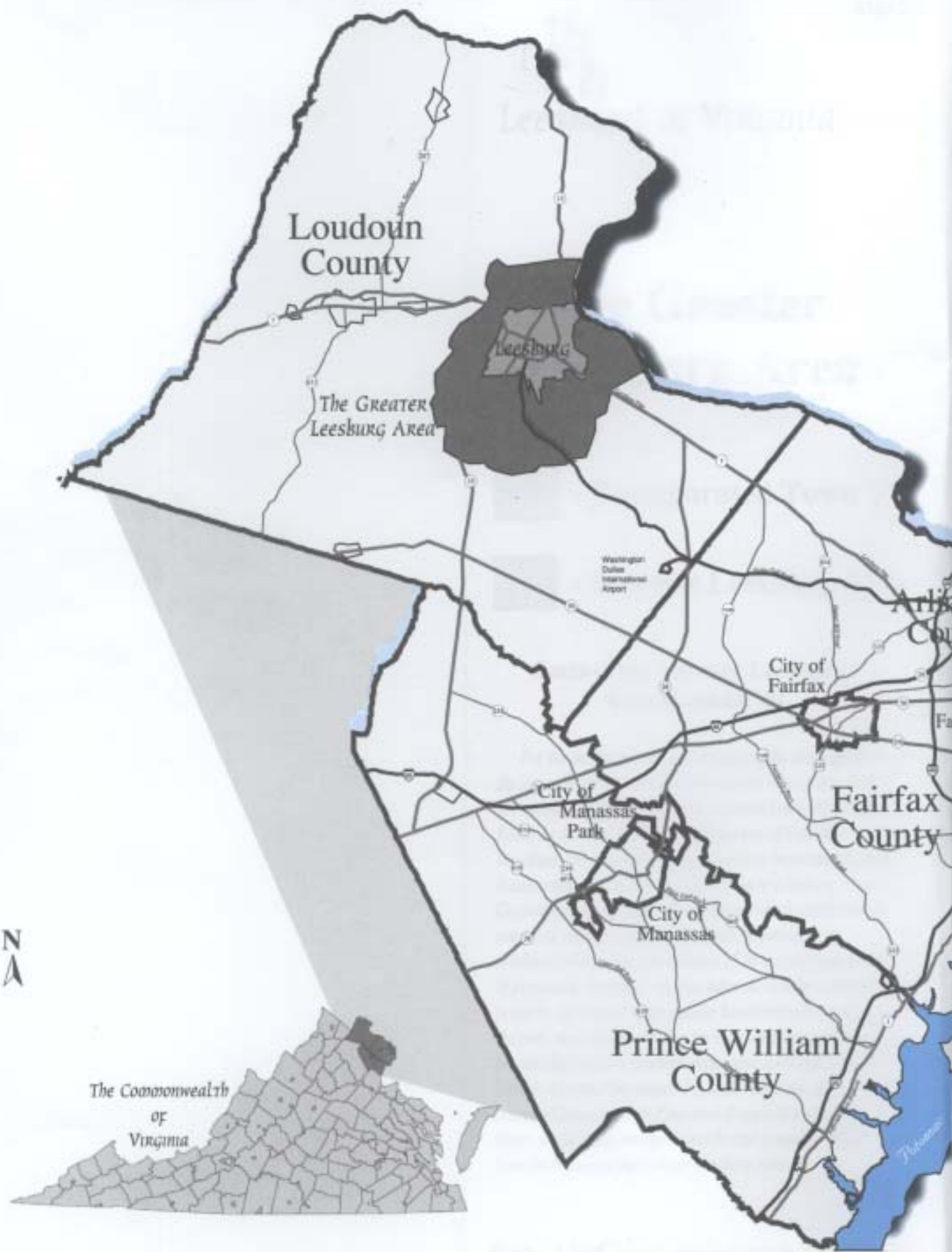
- Background: a brief historical overview and evaluation of existing conditions.
- Projections: an estimate of conditions expected to occur within the next 10 years, based on historical data and recent studies by the town planning staff, Loudoun County and various regional planning agencies.
- Goals and Objectives: overall guidelines for each element; goals generally describe a desired end state, while objectives provide a more specific suggestion for reaching adopted goals.
- Implementation Program: three levels of plan implementation including policy guidance, a recommended action program, and annual review criteria. The policy section contains qualitative policy guidelines to help the town evaluate planning and land development choices, as well as quantitative standards to be used in assessing the relative merits of specific proposals in the context of the town's goals and objectives. The action program contains specific tasks suggested for implementation during the first five years after adoption of the plan. These recommendations are intended to implement the objectives and policies contained in the plan. Finally, annual review criteria suggest information which would be gathered to evaluate the effectiveness of the plan. They form the basis for the annual review process outlined on page 0-5.

REVIEW PROCESS

The importance of a regular, thorough review of the Town Plan was discussed on the previous page. In addition to the state-mandated five-year review, an annual or biennial review process is recommended that would include the following elements:

- Status Report - A report prepared by staff based on the data identified in the review criteria for each element. This would include analysis of trends, revised projections as appropriate, and identification of possible changes needed. Based on the staff review of this report, the Planning Commission and Town Council could undertake further review as outlined below.
- Review of Goals and Objectives - A cooperative Planning Commission/Town Council review and revision, if necessary, using the information in the annual status report and public input.
- Review of Implementation Program - A selective review and revision, if necessary, of the implementation program by the Planning Commission and Council.

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The Town of Leesburg in Virginia

The Greater Leesburg Area



- Incorporated Town



- Greater Leesburg Area

Basis of the Greater Leesburg Area Boundaries

For the most part, this area consists of the north side of the lower Goose Creek basin between two ridge roads—Route 659 (Belmont Ridge Road) on the east and Route 662 (Canby Road) on the west, following the ridge line of Catoclin Mountain. Its boundaries are anchored by important physical features that "announce" the approaches to Leesburg. One is Goose Creek itself, a State Scenic River, which establishes the south and east boundaries. The southern perimeter is reinforced in the area east of Route 15 by a significant stretch of permanent open space that includes the historic Oatlands property, the Emmet estate and the Banshee Reeks estate. On the west, the boundary follows the Catoclin ridge northward across Clark's Gap to another permanent open space, the historic Morven Park estate. From Morven Park, the boundary flows east with Limestone Branch to the Potomac River, whose steep, wooded banks furnish a natural edge for both the Town and the Greater Leesburg Area.

Scale: 1 inch equals approximately 6.25 Miles.

